131 Caspian at Fort St. Nicholas on the Astara. The eastern frontier, some 450 miles in length, is formed by the Caspian Sea from the Bay of Agrakhan to the River Astara.

Geographically Transcaucasia is so placed that, with the development of communications, it should reap considerable advantages from the commercial development both of northern Persia and of north-eastern Asia Minor.

(2) Surface, Coasts, and River System

Surface

133 Transcaucasia is divided across the centre from west to east by the two valleys of the Rion and Kura, the head-waters of which are separated by the low ridge of the Suram Mountains, connecting the Caucasus with the Armenian Highlands. These valleys run west and east into the Black and Caspian Seas respectively. They are roughly equivalent to the Governments of Kutais (the Rion valley), Tiflis, Elisavetopol, and Baku. The Governments of Kutais and Tiflis and parts of Batum form the region known as Georgia.

The Rion valley is narrowed in its upper part by the mountainous district of Svanetia, but begins to broaden west of Kutais, and becomes a flat, marshy plain. The Kura valley narrows about Tiflis, and then widens till, at the Mughan steppe, it is over 100 miles broad. The valley floor slopes gently east from 1,200 ft. at Tiflis to 500 ft. in the middle of its course, and 85 ft. below sea level at the Caspian. The only interruption is caused by a plateau of between 2,000 and 3,000 ft. along the southern foot-hills of the eastern Caucasus in the region known as Kakhetia.

134 The soil in the Rion and upper Kura valleys is extraordinarily fertile. On the southern slope of the Caucasus, in fact, almost every available patch of ground is successfully utilized for agriculture, even up to a height of 7,000–8,000 ft. Most of the steppes in the lower Kura valley are too dry to be cultivated without the aid of irrigation.